

## TESTING YOUR TRANSLATION

**Dr. Jacob Loewen** is a UBS Translations Consultant at present on study leave.

This article is really a short summary of a chapter from the forthcoming book *The Practice of Translation: A Workbook for Training Bible Translators*. In the Workbook itself each kind of test will, of course, be accompanied by both Old and New Testament drills by means of which the translators can develop their skills in the suggested procedure. In the article, however, we will present only the principle of each test and one of two examples with comments. (In the examples the “Your Language” (YL) slot is the important one for you, since the real test must be applied to your own translation.)

Let us now assume that you have just completed the entire translation process on the New Testament. Your first draft has gone through all the stages of revision and is now ready for the final checking before being sent to the Bible Society. At the Bible Society the manuscript examiner or the copy editor will, of course, do a lot of professional checking before the manuscript actually goes to the printers. But over and above these checks, what tests can and should you as translator(s) apply to your work to eliminate any “little foxes” that could seriously undermine the impact of your work? Here now, are a few suggestions.

### **General tests to be applied to new translations**

**Reading Aloud.** Hearing a translation read aloud often makes people aware of rough spots left in it. Such reading can take several forms.

1. Reading aloud by one member of the translation team while other members each follow in a different version to check for inaccuracies, missing fragments, and wrong interpretations.
2. Reading aloud by one member of the team while other members merely listen. This is to discover any ambiguous, strange or rough renderings that need to be improved.
3. Reading aloud to various kinds of audiences—women, children, illiterates, church audiences, and so on. The reading should be of complete units and the listeners should then be encouraged to discuss and ask questions about the text. Also, prepared questions can be asked to check the hearer’s understanding. Any concerns expressed by hearers should be carefully considered. A variant form, using a prerecorded reading, is often useful, because it can be replayed just as it was heard the first time to locate problem spots.
4. Reading aloud by various people not connected with the project. This should include children, women, and new literates, and so on. All hesitations, false starts, errors, substitutions, should be noted. Making a tape recording of the reading is useful to assure a record of all the problems. If several people have the same problem, the text probably needs to be adjusted. It does not flow smoothly or the expressions put together don’t really fit in with each other. A variant of this test is to have a person not connected with the translation read a passage to a church audience. The translation team should note audience reactions and the reader’s

problems. A discussion led by the reader can be helpful to check on ambiguities and other problems.

**Publishing preliminary versions.** Several teams have found it very helpful to send problem verses or passages to churches in mimeographed form, often with several alternative versions, or at least alternative words at certain points. Churches are then asked to pray with the team: "Lord how would you have said this if you had spoken our language in the first place?" This creates churchwide involvement in the translation process.

Another way of testing new translation is by publishing some chapters or a short book in preliminary but printed form with requests for reaction on problem spots. Preliminary editions have sometimes even included variants to make sure readers came to grips with crucial questions. Several teams have promised a new clean book to any reader who will mark his copy with corrections and then return it to the team.

### Testing the Understandability by the Cloze Technique

In the Cloze test you select a random paragraph from a translation and in it you replace every fifth word by a blank space. The person taking the test reads the selection and writes in the word he thinks would fit most meaningfully into the blank. The words supplied will indicate how well the person has understood the paragraph. Check your own understanding of the following English translation by filling in the blanks provided.

You may test the translation in your language in the same way. Prepare a text with every fifth word left blank. You should aim at a minimum of 35 to 50 blanks for each passage checked.

### Example

But the Jews were \_\_\_\_\_ and gathered some of \_\_\_\_\_ worthless loafers from the \_\_\_\_\_ and formed a mob. \_\_\_\_\_ set the whole city \_\_\_\_\_ an uproar, and attacked \_\_\_\_\_ home of a man Jason, \_\_\_\_\_ in an attempt \_\_\_\_\_ find Paul and Silas \_\_\_\_\_ bring them out to \_\_\_\_\_ people. But when they \_\_\_\_\_ not find them, they \_\_\_\_\_ Jason and some other \_\_\_\_\_ before the city authorities \_\_\_\_\_ shouted, "These men have \_\_\_\_\_ trouble everywhere! Now they \_\_\_\_\_ come to our city, \_\_\_\_\_ Jason has kept them \_\_\_\_\_ his house. They are \_\_\_\_\_ breaking the laws of \_\_\_\_\_ Emperor, saying that there \_\_\_\_\_ another king, whose name \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus." With these words they \_\_\_\_\_ the crowd and the \_\_\_\_\_ authorities in an uproar. \_\_\_\_\_ authorities made Jason and \_\_\_\_\_ others pay the required \_\_\_\_\_ of money to be \_\_\_\_\_ and then let them \_\_\_\_\_.

### Checking a Translation for Faithfulness to the Original

A translation should be as faithful a representation of the original as possible, including both form and meaning. Obviously, for a dynamic equivalent (meaning-for-meaning) translation the meaning is always the first consideration.

For common language translations there is a second consideration, namely, the clarity and simplicity of the language used.

In this test we now want to compare translations and see if they are (1) accurate, and (2) easily understood. You should remember that tests given on various passages in your translation are merely samples of the kind of tests that

should be performed. The actual passages used in the test may vary from language to language.

### Instructions

(a) Study the RSV and GNB as your original texts, remembering that the RSV gives priority to the form and the GNB gives priority to the meaning. For difficult passages, do not trust your own judgment, consult a good Bible commentary.

(b) Compare your translation with the translations given below, to see: (1) whether both form and meaning have been translated, (2) whether the meaning is a faithful representation of the original, and (3) whether the way in which it has been said is easy to understand.

### Example

#### Mt 6.22

**RSV** so, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light

**GNB** if your eyes are sound, your whole body will be full of light

#### Compare:

**NEB** if you eyes are sound, you will have light for your whole body

**JB** it follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light

**LB** if your eye is pure, there will be sunshine in your soul

**TNT** if your eye is in good condition your whole body will be full of light

**JBP** if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light

**NAB** if your eyes are good, your body will be filled with light

**NAS** if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light

**YL** .....

#### Evaluation:

There is some difference between *sound* meaning 'healthy' or 'good condition', and *pure* in LB. But there is a sharp difference between *body* meaning 'whole being' and *soul* in LB. Finally, the expression *full of light* meaning 'without darkness or unsoundness' is a much more serious expression than *sunshine in your soul* in LB. The use of *clear* for *sound* in NAS sounds strange in common language English.

### Historical and Cultural Faithfulness to the Original

One of the important limitations governing the adjustment of the Biblical form in translation is that the adjusted form should never misrepresent Biblical history or culture.

### Instructions

Read the translations presented, including your language, noting especially all cultural and historical information. Do any of the translations presented contain any information which you feel misrepresents either Biblical history or culture? How could you avoid the misrepresentation and still be fully meaningful? Make the adjustments in YL, if necessary.

### Example

#### 1 Cor 16.20

**RSV** greet each other with a holy kiss

*Compare:*

- GNB** greet one another with a brotherly kiss
- NEB** greet one another with a kiss of peace
- LB** give each other a loving handshake when you meet
- JBP** shake hands all round as a sign of Christian love
- TNT** greet one another with a holy kiss
- YL** .....

*Evaluation:*

*Kissing* as a greeting is a problem in many cultures. LB and JBP use *handshake* but that misrepresents Biblical culture—they did not shake hands. For cultural situations in which the Biblical form creates problems one could translate: *greet each other warmly as Christians ought*. This leaves the form unstated. The Biblical form could then be given in a footnote with the cultural explanation.

**Checking a Translation for Emotive Accuracy**

A good translation not only is accurate in regard to the information contained in the original, it also tries to maintain the same emotive level as the original. On the whole, a translation should not be less emotive than the original and, in fact, it should be at least 20% more emotive than the RSV, or substitute Greek and Hebrew, because the RSV is a formal correspondence rather than a meaning-for-meaning translation, and as such hides a good part of the emotive force of the original.

**Instructions**

- (a) Study the numbered and underlined expressions in the RSV and identify the equivalent expressions in the other translations presented, including your language.
- (b) Rank the equivalent expression in each translation as emotively the same (S), higher (H), or lower (L) than the RSV.
- (c) Write your decisions on the summary lines provided and see which translations are consistently higher or lower than the RSV.

**Example**

**Mt 2.18**

**RSV** (1) a voice was heard in Ramah, (2) wailing and loud lamentation

*Compare:*

- GNB** a sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping
- LB** screams of anguish come from Ramah, weeping unrestrained
- NEB** a voice was heard in *Rama*, wailing and loud laments
- JB** a voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamenting
- YL** .....

*Summary:*

<b>TEV</b>	(1)	(2)
<b>LB</b>		
<b>NEB</b>		
<b>JB</b>		
<b>YL</b>		

NEB and JB are so similar to RSV that as modern translations they actually rank emotively lower. LB is probably too emotive with *screams* and *unrestrained*. GNB is about right.

**Checking a Translation for Theological Bias**

Most translators try hard to make an accurate translation. However, sometimes quite unconsciously their doctrine, or their political or social outlook begins to influence the translation. This is bias and it represents inaccuracy of the worst kind, since it bends the message of the translation to support their views. For example, when a translator wants to retain the plural in Genesis 1.26, "Let us make man" because he regards it as the first reference to the Trinity, he is letting a New Testament teaching influence his translation of the Old Testament. Or a translator may want to retain the singular seed in Genesis 3.15 to preserve a reference to Jesus Christ. Again, he may want to correct the text as the KJV (following Textus Receptus) did in Mark 1.2, "as it is written in the prophets", because Mark quotes both Malachi and Isaiah, when the recognized original text clearly says as in the RSV, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet". Or he may translate demon possession with "psychiatric problems". All such "adjustments" are to be avoided because they represent bias and do not accurately reflect the values and the presuppositions which underlie the Biblical text.

**Instructions**

Compare the translations presented and see if they are significantly different from the RSV. Do you detect any possible bias?

**Example**

**Mt 1.17**

**RSV** so all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations

*Compare:*

**GNB** so then, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David

**NEB** there were thus fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David

**LB** these are fourteen of the generations from Abraham to King David

**JBP** the genealogy of Jesus Christ may thus be traced for fourteen generations from Abraham to David

**YL** .....

*Evaluation:*

LB tries to leave open the door for more generations between Abraham and David because it is aware that other genealogies differ. But this makes it unfaithful to what Matthew says. The translator will often face the temptation to harmonize contradictory renderings, but he must avoid the temptation. His task is to translate faithfully what the given text says.

**Lk 13.11**

**RSV** there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years

*Compare:*

**GNB** a woman there had an evil spirit that made her ill for eighteen years

**NEB** there was a woman there possessed by a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years

**LB** he saw a seriously handicapped woman who had been bent double for eighteen years

**JBP** In the congregation was a woman who for eighteen years had been ill from some psychological cause

<b>JB</b>	a woman was there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that had enfeebled her
<b>German</b>	unter den Zuhörern war eine Frau, die schon achtzehn Jahre lang krank
<b>CL</b>	war
	<i>in the audience there was a woman who had been sick for eighteen years</i>
<b>YL</b>	.....

*Evaluation:*

Only GNB plainly spells out the *evil spirit* cause. NEB and JB remain somewhat ambiguous by using only *spirit*. LB suggests a purely physical handicap and JBP a psychological problem, both seem to be influenced by our modern view of illness. The German common language translation, probably for the same reason, leaves out all reference to cause.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

## TRANSLATING 1 CORINTHIANS

**Dr. Paul Ellingworth** is a UBS Translations Consultant, and is Editor of the Technical Papers series of *The Bible Translator*.

In April 1961, *The Bible Translator* published an article entitled "New Help for Translators", announcing the first Translator's Handbook, on Mark, and including two specimen pages. The editor's introduction to the article stated:

"With the appearance of this volume there has been initiated an extensive programme for the production of an entire series of such helps for translators, to include in the first stage . . . Handbooks on Acts, Luke, John, and 1 and 2 Corinthians."

The United Bible Societies keeps its promises, sooner or later. So the inside covers of *The Bible Translator* now list a series of translator's helps, including many handbooks not mentioned in 1961. However, the "first stage" must still be going on, nearly twenty year later, since the handbooks on 1 and 2 Corinthians have not yet appeared. This article is based on the experience of gathering material for the handbook on 1 Corinthians.

Anyone translating this letter is sometimes excited, and sometimes frustrated. Excited, because in the letters to the Corinthians we see more deeply than anywhere else in the New Testament into the life of a young church. Paul's first visit to Corinth lasted almost two years. He wrote at least three letters to the Christians there, and received at least one letter from them. He probably knew the people at Corinth better than any other group to which he wrote. He knew them well enough to scold them at times (see 1 Cor 4.18-21, 11.13-22; all quotations are from the Good News Bible: Today's English Version, abbreviated GNB, unless otherwise stated). At times, they seem to have tested his patience almost to breaking point (2 Cor 2.4, 7.5). 1 and 2 Corinthians are personal letters to real people, dealing with real situations.

That is why translators are sometimes frustrated. More than in the case of any other New Testament letter, we need to know about the situation, in order to understand the text. Who, for example, were "Chloe's people" (1 Cor 1.11, RSV)? Members of her family, as GNB thinks? Slaves, or other dependants? Friends? People who met and worshipped in her home? We do not know, but as translators we need to know.